SPECIAL COVERAGE

MAGIC The Gathering

New York City Professional Tournament

February 17–18, 1996

Hallowed Ground
1
Enchantment
: Return target non-snow-covered land you control to owner's hand.
"On this site where Kjeld's blood was spilled, let none raise a fist or deny a beggar."
—Halvor Arenson, Kjeldoran Priest
Illus. Douglas Shuler
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Armageddon
3
Destroy all
NYC Finalists
MAGIC:
With these decisive cards, Michael Loconto of Massachusetts, right, and Frenchman Bertrand Lestrée fought it out in the Big Apple championship showdown.

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NEW YORK CITY PROFESSIONAL TOURNAMENT

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"I believe that the best thing that can come as a result of tournaments like this is that Magic gets elevated to the level of a professional, intellectual sport."

—Richard Garfield, Magic Game Designer

Senior Division Participants

Magic: The Gathering Professional Tournament (New York City, Feb. 17–18, 1996)

Senior Division Place Finishers

PLACE	NAME	RESIDENCE	AGE
Champion	Michael Loconto	Grafton, MA	26
Finalist	Bertrand Lestrée	Pantin, France	25
Semifinalist	Leon Lindbäck	Stockholm, Sweden	20
Semifinalist	Preston Poulter	Irvine, CA	22
Quarterfinalist	George H. Baxter	Dallas, TX	23
Quarterfinalist	"Hammer" Regnier	Manchester, NH	27
Quarterfinalist	Mark Justice	West Valley City, UT	26
Quarterfinalist	Eric Tam	Toronto, Canada	18
Round of 16	Thomas Andersson	Taby, Sweden	25
Round of 16	Dennis Bentley	Churchville, NY	26
Round of 16	Christopher Bishop	Charlottesville, VA	27
Round of 16	Sean Fleischman	Bronx, NY	26
Round of 16	Jim Lemire	South Broro, MA	26
Round of 16	Andre Redi	Cilavena, Pavia, Italy	–
Round of 16	Bruce Swiney	Tacoma, WA	20
Round of 16	Nathan Wildgrube	New York, NY	25
17th	Laurent Lebas	France	25
18th	Michael Long	Centreville, VA	20
19th	Robert Lugiano, Jr.	Wilkes-Barre, PA	25
20th	Arjan Salomons	Leiden, Netherlands	–
21st	Jamie Wakefield	E. Middlebury, VT	30
22nd	Ward Ahders	Bohemia, NY	38
23rd	Bo Bell	San Dimas, CA	23
24th	Nick Hsieh	Forest Hills, NY	28
25th	David Humphreys	Somerville, MA	32
26th	Chris Pikula	Ithaca, NY	20
27th	Michael Sochon	France	19
28th	Marc Laud Aquino	Ithaca, NY	25
29th	Alexander Blumke	Thônex, Switzerland	26
30th	Brian Bouton	Keswick, VA	57
31st	Scott Burke	Corvallis, OR	26
32nd	Steve Clarys	Deurne, Belgium	–
33rd	Jan Maarten Cobben	Grongen, Netherlands	35
34th	Frank Gilson	Anaheim, CA	29
35th	Lucas Gonzalez	Miami, FL	28
36th	Adam Maysonet	Sunrise, FL	24
37th	James McGovern	Middle Village, NY	31
38th	Freek Ten Cate	Netherlands	–
39th	Patrick Albro	Rochester, NY	23
40th	Don Catanzaro	Newington, CT	25
41st	Rich Lipman	Rochester, NY	38
42nd	David Price	Ithaca, NY	20
43rd	Joel Unger	Santa Barbara, CA	25
44th	Seyil Yoon	Toronto, Canada	22
45th	Barry Young	Haddonfield, NJ	38
46th	David Bartholow	Ithaca, NY	19
47th	Lee McLain	Cuyahoga Falls, OH	26
48th	Cary Newburger	New York, NY	36
49th	Mu Luen Wang	Wien, Austria	23
50th	Zak Dolan	San Francisco, CA	27
51st	Bill Sperounis	Roslindale, MA	25
52nd	Clementine Bagieu	Paris, France	19
53rd	Vaughn Sandor	Woodbridge, NJ	27
54th	Sean Conway	Abington, MA	30
55th	Lee Hansen	Birmingham, AL	27
56th	Mark Chalice	Claremont, CA	23
57th	Mario Robaina	Manhattan Beach, CA	23
58th	Thierry Dallacroce	Calabassas, CA	24
59th	Dave Goodnuff	Cranbury, NJ	23
60th	Jeff Pysher	Newark, DE	32
61st	Henry Stern	Los Angeles, CA	27
62nd	Martin Ludecke	Berlin, Germany	25
63rd	Matt Ferrelli	Tewksbury, MA	20
64th	Gunnar Rehfsdahl	Hamburg, Germany	–

Other Senior Participants (in alphabetical order)

NAME	RESIDENCE	AGE
Paul Abbott	England	30
James C. Allen	Andover, MA	35
Ralph H. Anderson	New York, NY	44
Andre Arnaud	Boulogne, France	23
Mike Baker	Los Angeles, CA	30
Mark Behnke	Boston, MA	36
Craig Boettcher	Londonderry, NH	21
Sean Bogdon	Wilkes-Barre, PA	18
Stephane Bolduc	Montreal, Canada	24
Pierre Bonfond	Laval, Canada	32
Karl Borst	Toronto, Canada	24
Daniel Brickwell	Berlin, Germany	25
Jason Bulmahn	Milwaukee, WI	19
David Burchill	State College, PA	19
Robert Caliolo	Seacliff, NY	38
Tim Casey	Mountain View, CA	29
Patrick Chan	Ottawa, Canada	26
Kierin Chase	Suffern, NY	23
John Chinnock	Summit, NJ	24
Michael Conrad	Jacksonville, FL	28
Jeramy Cooke	Toronto, Canada	21
Wayne Cowette	Torrington, CT	23
D.Crapuchettes	Annapolis, MD	26
Ivan Curina	Grugliasco, Italy	–
Michael Cusick	Arlington, VA	27
Shawn Davies	Ottawa, Canada	22
Cyrille DeFoucaud	Paris, France	21
H. Denault-Reynolds	Richmond, VT	29
M. Denault-Reynolds	Richmond, VT	29
Trevor Desroches	Fredericton, Canada	24
Johan Disenborg	Stockholm, Sweden	22
Jay Dittbenner	Londonderry, NH	21
Douglas Dixon	Philadelphia, PA	24
Richard Dominguez	Linden, NJ	23
Michael Donovan	Robertsville, MO	30
Robert Dougherty	Cambridge, MA	26
David Doust	Miami, FL	31
Stacy Doust	Miami, FL	25
Michael Dove	Rolla, MO	24
Chad Ducharme	Newbury Port, MA	23
Rick Dutton	Columbia, MD	34
William Eager	Ouiedo, FL	59
Michael Eaton	Honolulu, HI	24
Rusty Ely	Abilene, TX	19
Christopher Esko	Pittsburgh, PA	21
Elaine Ferrao	Monsey, NY	22
Mike Fitzgerald	Weston, CT	47
David Fournier	Hoboken, NJ	39
Stefan Franzisco	Wiesen, Germany	25
Robert Fulton	Woodbridge, VA	22
Miles Gilbert	Auburndale, MA	36
David M. Glotfeltly	Bowie, MD	37
Scott Gower	Memphis, TN	29
John Grieggs	Pasadena, CA	36
Tim Gurciullo	Los Angeles, CA	27
Neil Guthrie	Stockholm, Sweden	35
Peter Gysemans	Heverlee, Belgium	20
Randy Habel	Fenton, MO	44
Kale Harding	Fredericton, Canada	22
Donat Hauser	Gossau, Switzerland	–
Sam Heckman	Elgin, IL	19
Marc Hernandez	Paris, France	–
Chip Hogan	Denton, TX	21
Stuart J. Holme	Charlottesville, VA	31
Jamie Hooper	Fulham, England	25
Anthony Houssain	Lambard, IL	26
Bob Jarmak	Bow, NH	21
James Jenkins	Odenton, MD	25
Colin Jones	Fords, NJ	31
Robert Jones	Odenton, MD	23
Steven Jones	New York, NY	38
William Kincaid	Topeka, KS	30
Jason Klank	Taylors, SC	26
Robert Kline	Ithaca, NY	22
Robert Koschak	Minneapolis, MN	–
Rob Kron	Monmouth Junction, NJ	27
Peter Leither	Largo, FL	–
Freddy Lenoir	St. Gallen, Switzerland	19
Michael Lenz	Hoboken, NJ	39
Carl Libassi	Worcester, MA	23
Ken Lignelli	Fairfield, CT	27
Christopher Ling	Fredricton, Canada	22
William Macey	Chestnut Hill, MA	21
Jeffrey Matzelle	State College, PA	29
Lonnie Meador	Abilene, TX	33
Ian Meagher	Dublin, Ireland	22
Brad Mennell	Newton, MA	–
Darwin Mess	Allston, MA	24
Chad Meyer	Weedesport, NY	29
Dave Meyvis	Heverlee, Belgium	21
Connor Middleton	Marietta, GA	22
John Miller	Pittsburgh, PA	18
Anthony Monteleone	Pittsburgh, PA	42
Andrew Morby	Olympia, WA	27
Mark Morimoto	Honolulu, HI	28
Mike Murphy	Kenilworth, NJ	27
Tom Murray	Waterbury, CT	27
Alan Newman	Wantagh, NY	55
Cuong Nguyen	Cupertino, CA	33
Rex Nguyen	Cupertino, CA	37
Dennis Nichols	Omaha, NE	24
Ian S. O'Neal	Andover, MA	25
John O'Shea	Syracuse, NY	30
Joe Overton	Carton, GA	24
Adam Ozkum	Rochester, NY	33
Mark Pancerella	Manassas, VA	24
D.Papeocrassas	Esher, United Kingdom	28
Marc Paschover	Antwerp, Belgium	19
Bob Perez	Redmond, WA	43
Gabriele Pisicchio	Rome, Italy	34
Matt Place	Kansas City, MO	42
Charles Poirier	Durham, NC	40
Greg Porter	Lynchburg, VA	34
Chris Pratt	Abilene, TX	27
Brian Pugnier	San Pedro, CA	21
Gary Quinn	New Martinville, W. VA	31
Jed Raben	New York, NY	35
Derek Rank	Centerville, VA	40
Lawrence Reed	Rockville, MD	30
Chris Rhodes	Houston, TX	25
James Ridgeway	Charlottesville, VA	23
Karen Roche	Miami, FL	26
John Joseph Rokous	Bradford, MA	35
Neal Rosenstein	New York, NY	35
Dana Rossi	Monson, MA	20
Tom Rossi	Havertown, PA	20
Eric Ruocco	St. Louis, MO	29
Nathan Russell	Ottawa, Ontario, Canada	26
Joseph Sabatini	Forked River, NJ	24
Jeffrey Sandler	Norwalk, CT	24
Frank Schacherer	Berlin, Germany	25
Henri Schildt	Helsinki, Finland	–
Mark Schneider	Lutherville, MD	43
Jerome Schwartz	Yardley, PA	50
Mike Scott	Groton, CT	28
Rodney Sheldon	E. Middlebury, VT	31
Doug Shepardson	Colchester, VT	32
Michael Singer, Jr.	Arnold, MO	28
Greg Sivco	Warren, NJ	39
Erich Skrika	Gansevoort, NY	19
Russell Smith	Denver, CO	40
Alvaro Sousa	Miami, FL	28
Jack Lewis Stanton	Idaho Falls, ID	22
Ryan Stapleton	State College, PA	21
Daniel Staub	State College, PA	21
Chris Suver	Seattle, WA	40
Erik Thompson	Rochester, NY	29
Steve Tibbs	Julian, PA	24
Tim Trenholm	Fredricton, Canada	22
T. Toshima-ku	Tokyo, Japan	29
Y. Nakano-ku	Tokyo, Japan	33
P. Zwalmen	Brussels, Belgium	32
Bart Van Uffelen	Antwerp, Belgium	–
David Van Dijck	Heverlee, Belgium	27
Linus Vernyns	Heverlee, Belgium	19
Lois Vigneault	Montreal, Canada	29
W. Von Derheghe	Antwerp, Belgium	27
Bob Wagner	Chicago, IL	42
Norman Wagner	Ergolding, Germany	42
Cliff Wallach	Buffalo Grove, IL	36
Ken Wallach	Deerfield, IL	31
Timothy Ward	Piscataway, NJ	37
Jackie Weaver	Morrisville, PA	31
Trevis Webb	Reno, NV	28
Chip Wendt	Healdsburg, CA	38
Eric Wenokor	Brooklyn, NY	35
Robert White	Frederick, MD	53
George Wilkinson	Manchester, NH	38
John Willis	Frederick, MD	41
Jonathan Willis	Frederick, MD	20
Vance Winchelle	Haville, MA	27
Curtis Wright	Lake Hopatcong, NJ	42
Reinald Yoder	Princeton, NJ	27

Tourney Recap

$1,000,000 Magic Pro Tour Debuts in The Big Apple

By Terry Melia

Not even a raging blizzard could stop the first-ever **Magic: The Gathering®** professional tournament from taking place in frigid New York City over President's Day weekend, although it did postpone play on the first day of competition by nearly four hours.

The first stop on WotC's Pro Tournament circuit was made on February 17 and 18 inside The Puck Building, a nine-story, 111-year-old Romanesque Revival structure standing tall in Manhattan's SoHo District. A total of 347 participants—239 Seniors (eighteen years old and older) and 108 Juniors—braved the elements and New York City cab drivers to test their mettle against the best **Magic** players in the world. With a total of $60,000 in prize money being awarded (including $30,000 in scholarship money for the Juniors), players young and old traveled across the globe to be part of the historic event.

Lestrée's slow strategy did not rattle eventual champ Loconto.

"Luck won't be a factor. I believe the best players are going to win this tournament, one way or another," predicted U.S. National Champ Mark Justice the day before actual play began. "You won't see any surprises up there on the stage on Sunday."

Besides Justice, several other top-notch **Magic** players were competing in the Senior division, including reigning World Champion Alexander Blumke of Switzerland, Austrian National Champ Mu Luen Wang, French National Champion Marc Hernandez, Canadian National Champ Eric Tam, and 1994 World Champion Zak Dolan. But in the end, despite playing well, none of the pre-tournament favorites walked away with top honors. Instead, it was little-known Michael Loconto of Grafton, Massachusetts, who emerged as champion.

Loconto simply would not crack under the hot lights. The twenty-six-year-old social worker used all the right moves and a sixty-two-card white-and-blue Millstone deck during his march to the finals. It was in the championship match, however—against twenty-five-year-old Frenchman Bertrand Lestrée, who was a 1994 finalist in the **Magic** World Championships—where Loconto's endurance and patience proved most valuable.

What started out as an eagerly anticipated, best-of-five-games match turned into a slow-moving, time-consuming battle. In fact, as the three-hour mark approached, the score stood knotted at just one game apiece.

By this time, both competitors were showing the wear and tear of this marathon match. After a brief meeting between the players and the judges following the second game, an unusual declaration was announced. Because the match was running so late, the finalists and officials agreed that the third game would decide the champion. As for the prize money, both Loconto and Lestrée resolved to split the winnings—a combined $17,000!

Late in the third game, Lestrée, using a sixty-card white-and-green deck, got the upper hand with a Whirling Dervish followed by an Armageddon. Loconto, as a result, was faced with the situation of a powerful creature (it had grown to 5/5), very little life, and no land in play. Word started to spread that Lestrée was about to be crowned champ.

With a Plains in his hand, Loconto had only one card in his library that could save him: Swords to Plowshares. The entire audience waited in great suspense as Loconto slowly made his draw, revealing this game-saving card. He then rebuilt his defense, and Lestrée was never again able to penetrate. Eventually Loconto bested Lestrée by running him out of cards.

"This title means everything to me," said Loconto. "And even though we'd decided to split the prize money, I was still playing for the glory. The recognition is what's important to me. Like Andy Warhol said, 'Everybody gets fifteen minutes of fame.' Well, this is my fifteen minutes."

"It was amazing!" exclaimed WotC founder Peter Adkison. "I haven't been so pumped up since the World Championships last summer."

A total of 347 Magic players, young and old, braved New York City snow—and one another—to participate in the first-ever Magic Professional Tournament.

For Lestrée, it was a bittersweet ending to another exciting chapter of **Magic**.

"I'm very happy, to tell you the truth. I'm here in New York, and I've met many great people," he said, before mentioning he got only two hours of sleep the night before.

When asked about Loconto's miracle draw in the third and deciding game, Lestrée shrugged his shoulders and said, "That's **Magic** for you. Sometimes you win because you're lucky; sometimes you lose because you're unlucky. I'm sure I've won some games because I was lucky. That's just the way it is.

"I'm just glad it's over; I'm really tired. I can hardly stand."

Tournament rules, for those wondering, featured Type II play with a few modifications. Besides having to abide by the standard DC Type II restrictions, players were required to have five non-basic land cards from each of the legal sets in either their decks or their sideboards. The sets included: *Fourth Edition*™, *Fallen Empires*™, *Ice Age*™, *Chronicles*™, and *Homelands*™.

A special "play/draw" rule was introduced to minimize the luck factor of the opening draw. To even out the advantage normally going to the first player, the player going first under play/draw does not draw on his or her first turn. The tourney's first seven rounds were conducted in Swiss pairings style, which enabled players to experience a few bad games without being immediately eliminated. At the conclusion of the seventh round, the top sixteen players advanced to a single-elimination finals bracket.

The Junior division didn't attract quite as many competitors but still held its share of surprises. Early favorite Dan Hirschman, an eleven-year-old Bridge Life Master from Southfield, Michigan, never made it to the Round of 16, while fifteen-year-old Max Suver of Seattle seemed to have his way with opponents all the way to the semifinals.

In the end, however, the two top Juniors were a pair of seventeen-year-olds: Graham Tatomer of Santa Barbara, California, and Aaron Kline of East Windsor, New Jersey. In an exciting title match, Tatomer came from a 2–1 deficit to defeat Kline 3–2. The memorable victory translated to a $7,000 difference in scholarship winnings: $12,000 to Tatomer, $5,000 to Kline.

Richard Garfield, the man who designed **Magic: The Gathering**, was pleased not only by the competitive minds participating in New York, but also by the public's curiosity about the event. "I'm impressed by the turnout and the level of play I've witnessed so far," said Garfield, "as well as the good sportsmanship exhibited by all the players.

"I believe the best thing that can come as a result of tournaments like this is that **Magic** gets elevated to the level of a professional, intellectual sport. I guess, in a way, that makes all of these competitors intellectual athletes."

What's the next stop on the Pro Tour schedule? Southern California, from May 3 to May 5, aboard the majestic (though permanently docked) Queen Mary ship resting in Long Beach Harbor. Besides a different venue, the second professional tournament will sport a new set of rules and more prize money ($130,000 overall purse).

WotC President Peter Adkison was "pumped up" following the two-day tourney.

According to WotC Lead Events Designer Skaff Elias, the second professional tournament will follow a "booster draft" format, using two *Fourth Edition* booster packs and one *Homelands* booster for a total of thirty-eight cards. In booster drafts, players sit in groups of eight, and each player opens up a booster pack, selects one card, and then passes the booster pack to the player on his or her left. Players continue to pick from and pass the boosters until all cards are drafted. Players can then add whatever land cards they want in order to bring their decks up to a legal total of forty cards. The play/draw rule, as well as the Swiss pairings format used during the early rounds in New York City, will also follow suit in Long Beach.

As for the winner's purse, $22,000 will go to the top Open place-finisher and $6,600 to the best Junior. Loconto and Tatomer are both looking forward to defending their titles. Don't miss it! ■

Senior Runner-Up

Bertrand Lestrée of France Finishes Second—Again!

Lestrée's Deck (60 Cards)

1 Autumn Willow (HM)
1 Balance (4E)
1 Havenwood Battleground (FE)
1 Ivory Tower (4E)
1 Ruins of Trokair (FE)
1 Serra Angel (4E)
1 Zuran Orb (IA)
2 Fellwar Stone (4E)
2 Fyndhorn Elves (IA)
2 Icy Manipulator (IA)
2 Llanowar Elves (4E)
2 Land Tax (4E)
2 Order of Leitbur (FE)
2 Spectral Bears (HM)
2 Sylvan Library (4E)
2 Wrath of God (4E)
3 Armageddon (4E)
4 Brushland (IA)
4 Disenchant (IA/4E)
4 Erhnam Djinn (CH)
4 Strip Mine (4E)
4 Swords to Plowshares (4E/IA)
6 Forest
6 Plains

Sideboard (15 Cards)

1 Black Vise (4E)
1 Order of Leitbur (FE)
1 Wrath of God (4E)
2 Abbey Gargoyle (HM)
2 Circle of Protection: Green (4E/IA)
2 Circle of Protection: Red (4E/IA)
2 Divine Offering (CH)
2 Karma (4E)
2 Whirling Dervish (4E)

Second is one place Bertrand Lestrée of France is getting to know all too well. At the 1994 **Magic** World Championships in Milwaukee, he battled his way all the way to the tournament finals only to lose a difficult match to Zak Dolan of the U.S. At the first stop of the Pro Tour in New York City, Lestrée again blazed an impressive path to the championship round, only to lose a 2–1 heartbreaker to another stateside player—Michael Loconto of Grafton, Massachusetts.

"I trust that one day I will be first," Lestrée announced, moments after running out of cards against Loconto in the third and deciding game of their match. "I've already been second in the world, so I just need to be more lucky, I guess."

Luck certainly seemed to be on Lestrée's side for most of the tournament. The twenty-five-year-old Frenchman, who presently works in London as a business development strategist for a French-owned refuse management company, used a sixty-card, white-and-green deck and a slow-moving strategy that worked well until Loconto pulled a rabbit out of his hat in Game 3. *(See "Tourney Recap" on page 4 for details of their exciting championship match.)*

"I'd say the competition here was pretty tough," said Lestrée. "I don't think I had one easy match the entire tournament. Everybody's good. Especially Hammer—he's got a good deck."

Lestrée recorded a 6–1 mark following the Swiss-style pairings, to advance to the Round of 16. Ironically, one of his match victories came against Loconto. His lone defeat was delivered by George Baxter of Dallas.

Said Baxter, "I think I just got lucky. Bertrand's really an awesome player."

Shawn Regnier is the "Hammer" to whom Lestrée referred, a player whose nickname originated from a seven-year career as a professional arm-wrestler. And it was their match, in the quarterfinals, that probably drew the largest viewing audience—next to the championship duel, that is. The Lestrée-Regnier match was deadlocked at 1–1 following the allotted ninety minutes, and an additional hour was granted so they could finish. In the end, despite Hammer's distraction techniques, Lestrée eked out a memorable victory.

"The guy's a really good player, but he kept talking throughout our match," recalled Lestrée. "I guess it's part of his strategy. For the first two games I could deal with it, but during the last game I began to get a little upset. I just kept telling myself not to play his game and to keep concentrating on what I had to do."

Lestrée's professional composure throughout the tournament was a welcome sight for all. His reputation preceded him to New York. In last year's French Nationals, as the defending champion, he became so angry during a match that he punched a judge. Needless to say, he was ousted immediately from the competition.

In New York City, he was again ready to do battle, but only with his cards. He claimed he wasn't superstitious, but nevertheless throughout the two-day event, he sported his trademark slicked-back hair and the same all-black attire, which included a T-shirt reading (when translated from French) "Thank You for Giving Me Money." Evidently he knew something long before everybody else.

"I am not surprised by my performance here," said Lestrée. "I've been preparing different decks for at least a month, and I've probably put in ten hours a day for the last week trying out new strategies."

Lestrée's time-consuming practice sessions before (and during) the tournament, coupled with his flight from London, began to take a collective toll on the exhausted warrior. During the championship finals, he'd repeatedly tap his fingers on the tabletop, stretch his neck from side to side, and cough—all either in an effort to distract Loconto or to keep himself from nodding off.

"Both, I guess," said Lestrée, who—like Loconto—had battled ten opponents during the previous thirty-six hours. "I'm so tired. I've been playing for twelve hours straight, and I only slept for a couple of hours last night. I'm just glad it's over."

Luckily for Lestrée, he and Loconto agreed to split the first- and second-place prize winnings ($8,500 each) before they played the third game of their match. Asked if that took some of the pressure off, he said, "Yeah, sure, but we [both] wanted to win. Michael's a good player.

"I hope to play him again in Long Beach."

With $22,000 riding on first place, one can bet Lestrée will be at his fighting best. —*T.M.*

Senior CHAMPION

Michael Loconto Outlasts His Competition in NYC

Twenty-six-year-old Michael Loconto is used to putting in long days. As a social worker for the Massachusetts Department of Welfare and a part-time mental health counselor, he sometimes works as many as eighteen hours in a day. Loconto's training in late-night endurance proved especially valuable during the first-ever **Magic: The Gathering**® pro tournament, in New York City, a grueling event that had many players faltering due to fatigue—especially those advancing to the later rounds.

"I'll tell you, it didn't bother me at all, because I'm used to staying up late and working all the time," Loconto said, moments after defeating France's Bertrand Lestrée, 2–1, in the championship round. "It seems like I'm on the go all the time, so this was nothing new for me. And I must've gotten almost six hours of sleep last night, so I was fine."

Utilizing a slow, sixty-two-card, white-and-blue deck, Loconto methodically trudged his way to the title. Following the first seven rounds, he sported a 6–1 overall match record, with his only defeat, interestingly enough, coming at the hands of Lestrée, during the second round. Loconto was down—but not out—following his first encounter with Lestrée because the Type II tournament featured a Swiss-pairings format during the first seven rounds.

Once qualifying for the Round of 16, the Grafton, Mass., native locked horns with Italy's Andre Redi and came away with a hard-fought 2–0 victory. In the quarterfinals, Loconto met Canadian National Champ Eric Tam and again emerged with a 2–0 win. Then, in the semifinals, which utilized a best-of-five-games format, Loconto escaped with a 3–2 nailbiter over upstart Preston Poulter from Orange County, California.

Prior to the finals, Loconto contemplated his final-round strategy: "Well, I'm glad I played him [Lestrée] already, so now I know how his deck works," he said. "One of my friends back in Grafton runs a similar-type deck. The only problem I see with Bertrand's deck is that he doesn't have any blue in it. The friend I play against has a lot of Power Sinks, but what Bertrand does is he Armageddons you, and I just played an Armageddon deck. I'm ready."

In the finals, Loconto and Lestrée battled one another for better than four hours. Endurance, strategic moves, and a stroke of luck helped bring Loconto the title. *(For full details on the championship match, "Tourney Recap" story on page 4.)*

After clinching the number one spot, Loconto first shook hands with Lestrée, then collapsed into the waiting arms of his buddies from S.M.K. Collectibles, a retail shop located in Hudson, Mass., where he got his start in **Magic** two years ago. His next move? A quick phone call home to Grafton to let his parents know their only son was now a **Magic** pro tournament champion.

"This means everything to me. More so than the prize money, winning the overall title is what I wanted," said Loconto. "The recognition that goes along with winning the first-ever **Magic** pro tournament is something no one else can ever have. I was playing for the glory."

When asked to rate his level of competition at the first Pro Tournament, Loconto wasted no time. "The competition here was tremendous. I wish I could have met up with a couple of more famous people, because I wanted to butt heads with them, but that's okay. Bertrand's probably the best player in the world. He's a super guy. We seemed to really hit it off."

While he's not quite sure what he'll do with his newfound wealth ($8,500 in prize winnings), Loconto did mention that a portion of it will probably go to help finance his trip to Long Beach, California, for the second **Magic** competition.

Claiming he's not a superstitious player, Loconto did reveal that he kept one thing consistent in all his games: his dice—one red and one green. "I guess it's best to stick with what works for you," he said. "And these dice were working for me the whole tournament."

When asked to reveal his winning formula, Loconto smiled. "Slow and steady wins the race, my friend. Slow and steady."

Loconto is anxiously waiting to defend his title aboard the majestic Queen Mary in May. —*T.M.*

Loconto's Deck (62 Cards)

1 Balance (4E)
1 Deflection (IA)
1 Feldon's Cane (CH)
1 Ivory Tower (4E)
1 Jayemdae Tome (4E)
1 Recall (CH)
1 Ruins of Trokair (FE)
1 Strip Mine (4E)
1 Wizards' School (HM)
1 Zuran Orb (IA)
2 Blinking Spirit (IA)
2 Control Magic (4E)
2 Fountain of Youth (CH)
2 Hallowed Ground (IA)
2 Icy Manipulator (IA)
2 Land Tax (4E)
2 Svyelunite Temple (FE)
3 Millstone (4E)
4 Adarkar Wastes (IA)
4 Counterspell (IA/4E)
4 Disenchant (IA/4E)
4 Island
4 Mishra's Factory (4E)
4 Swords to Plowshares (4E/IA)
4 Wrath of God (4E)
7 Plains

Sideboard (15 Cards)

1 Control Magic (4E)
1 Divine Offering (CH)
1 Hydro Blast (IA)
1 Jester's Cap (IA)
2 Aeolipile (FE)
2 Circle of Protection: Red (4E/IA)
2 Sea Sprite (HM)
2 Serrated Arrow (HM)
2 Steal Artifact (4E)

PROFESSIONAL TOURNAMENT QUALIFIER INFORMATION

The second **Magic: The Gathering**® Professional Tournament will be held in Long Beach, California, May 3–5, 1996, aboard the famous Queen Mary ocean liner and will offer $130,000 in cash and scholarship prizes. In order to compete, players must qualify for each professional tournament. Here's who qualifies:

- Top sixty-four finishers from each division (Junior and Open) from the most recently held Pro Tournament.
- Top twenty-five Duelists' Convocation (DC)-ranked members not already invited to the competition. The DC is the official membership and sanctioning organization for **Magic: The Gathering**. By competing in sanctioned tournaments, all DC members receive the opportunity to elevate their rank and take one step closer to the Pro Tour.
- Qualifier tournament winners. Top finishers in the qualifier tournaments are entered in the Pro Tour. Qualifier tournaments precede each professional tournament in regions across the United States and around the world.

Wizards of the Coast (WotC) will announce the dates and locations of the various qualifier tournaments in all regions as they become available. Check the WotC website (www.wizards.com), *The Duelist Companion,* or any future issues of *The Duelist* for up-to-date information.

MAGIC The Gathering®

$1,000,000

QUALIFIER TOURNAMENTS + **TOP-RANKED DUELISTS' CONVOCATION MEMBERS** → **NEW YORK, NY PROFESSIONAL TOURNAMENT FEBRUARY 16–18, 1996** — **$60,000**

QUALIFIER TOURNAMENTS + **TOP-RANKED DUELISTS' CONVOCATION MEMBERS** → **LONG BEACH, CA PROFESSIONAL TOURNAMENT MAY 3–5, 1996** — **$130,000**

QUALIFIER TOURNAMENTS + **TOP-RANKED DUELISTS' CONVOCATION MEMBERS** → **COLUMBUS, OH PROFESSIONAL TOURNAMENT JULY 4–7, 1996** — **$155,000**

QUALIFIER TOURNAMENTS + **TOP-RANKED DUELISTS' CONVOCATION MEMBERS** → **ATLANTA, GA PROFESSIONAL TOURNAMENT* OCTOBER 1996** — **$205,000**

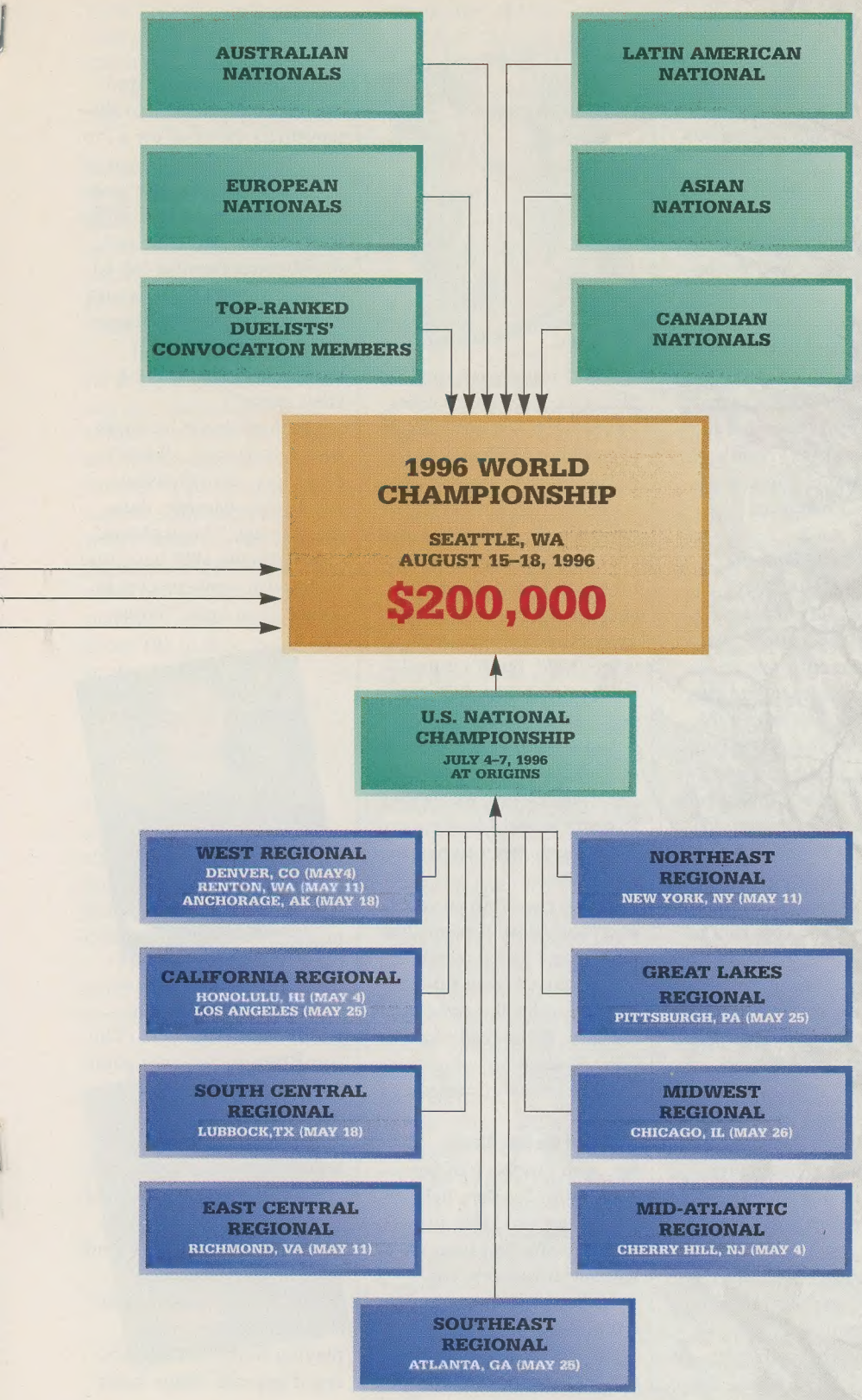
*Qualifies for 1997 World Championships

QUALIFIER TOURNAMENTS + **TOP-RANKED DUELISTS' CONVOCATION MEMBERS** → **DALLAS, TX PROFESSIONAL TOURNAMENT* NOVEMBER 1996** — **$250,000**

*Qualifies for 1997 World Championships

Qualifier tournaments for the second **Magic: The Gathering** Professional Tournament will be held in the following cities: Albuquerque, NM; Anchorage, AK; Antwerp, Belgium; Atlanta, GA; Barcelona, Spain; Boston, MA; Chicago, IL; Denver, CO; Hudson, MA; Iowa City, IA; Las Vegas, NV; Lincoln, NE; Little Rock, AR; London, England; Los Angeles, CA; Lubbock, TX; Mt. Laurel, NJ; New York, NY; Orlando, FL; Ottawa, Canada; Paris, France; Phoenix, AZ; Reno, NV; Rochester, NY; Rome, Italy; Sacramento, CA; Salt Lake City, UT; San Francisco, CA; Seattle, WA; Springlake, NC; Stockholm, Sweden; Syracuse, NY; and Toronto, Canada. For information, call **(206) 624-0933**. For registration, call **(619) 738-2379**. Locations are subject to change. Check Wizards of the Coast's website (www.wizards.com) for the most up-to-date information regarding qualifiers in your area.

PRO TOUR



NATIONAL and WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

There is open registration in May for all regional championships to be held across the country. Top finishers in each regional championship will go on to compete in the national championship. Locations and dates for regional championship tournaments can be obtained by calling the Duelists' Convocation at (206) 204-8032.

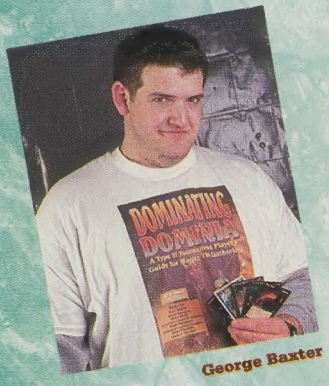
- The U.S. National Championship will be held July 4th weekend at Origins in Columbus, Ohio. Competitors at nationals will play for a chance to compete against players from other countries at the World Championships. Limited registration for the Open Division (all ages welcome) remains for the U.S. National Championship event. For more information about Origins, call (800) 529-EXPO.
- **Magic: The Gathering®** World Championships will be held August 15–18, 1996, in Seattle. It will pit the world's best national and pro players against one another. Top finishers from National Championships around the world, the top DC-ranked players, and top finishers on the Pro Tour will all be invited to compete for team and individual titles.
- Playing in DC-sanctioned tournaments is the only way to boost your DC rank and play your way to the top.

The Best of the Rest

Teacher Goes to School

George Baxter is no stranger to **Magic: The Gathering®**. He's already had four books published revealing different tactics used in playing the strategy game. But at the first Pro Tournament in NYC, even Baxter learned a thing or two.

"There are some incredible players here, and I was honored just to play against



George Baxter

some of them," said the twenty-three-year-old marketing director for Wordware Publishing in Dallas. "I even got the chance to play against Bertrand Lestrée [of France] during the early rounds, and he's awesome. I beat him, but I think I was lucky."

Baxter used a sixty-card black speed deck, with touches of red for direct damage and just enough green for Ernham Djinns. "I play a very offensive style," he explained. As a result, he won more games than he lost at the tournament.

After qualifying for the Top 16 with a 7–0 match record, he then defeated Jim Lemire of Massachusetts 2–1. In the quarterfinals, however, even Baxter's strategy showed it wasn't invincible. He dropped a hard-fought 2–1 match to Sweden's Leon Lindback.

"Hopefully, I'll pursue all five remaining Pro Tournaments. I think I can afford to go to Long Beach now, seeing as how I made it to the quarterfinals here," said Baxter. "But I'd like to get far enough in the next tournament so that Wizards of the Coast picks up the tab. That would be nice."

Time for Some Shut-Eye

As the United States' top-ranked **Magic** player, Mark Justice is used to tournament pressure. Therefore, after tallying an undefeated 7–0 record following the Swiss-style pairings and advancing past the Round of 16 at the first pro tournament, he surprised very few onlookers. But self-induced sleep deprivation during his nights in New York may have cost him in the end.

"When I come to these tournaments, I really just enjoy playing **Magic**," said the twenty-six-year-old sports card shop owner from Salt Lake City. "I like to have fun while I'm here."

For Justice, having fun means playing **Magic** morning, noon, and night. When he wasn't flattening opponents at the Puck Building, he could be found playing **Magic** against any and all takers in the hotel lobby—at the cost of not getting sleep.

Mark Justice

"But I really can't complain," he said, hours after losing 2–1 to Preston Poulter of southern California in the quarterfinals. "Actually I'm very, very happy with my performance. The deck I used performed incredibly well. It won its first eight matches and lost just one. It's unfortunate that my loss came when it did, but it's unrealistic to think that a deck can go 11 and 0 for you."

Justice used a sixty-card red artifact deck, which includes some white—for Swords to Plowshares and Balance—and just enough green to play two Stormbinds.

"I was tired, but so was everybody else. It seems like whenever I lose a match, it's just because I wasn't patient enough to let the game develop. I'll be ready for Long Beach."

Or at least well-rested.

New Kid on the Block

Leon Lindback of Stockholm, Sweden, believes in making good first impressions. At the first professional tournament, the twenty-year-old electrical engineering student accomplished just that. He raised eyebrows by defeating higher-ranked players and making it all the way to the semifinals. Not bad for a Pro Tour debut.

"It was also my first visit to New York, so this trip was really cool," said Lindback, shortly after bowing 3–0 to tourney runner-up Bertrand Lestrée. "I just hope **Magic** will continue to attract more people. It's really a great game."

Lindback made his mark with a sixty-card, all-black deck. "It's very offensive, you know—damage, damage, damage," he explained.

He believes skill has more to do with one's success in **Magic** than luck. "What-

Leon Lindback

ever deck you have, you can't win unless you're good," said Lindback. "The competition here was good. I'm just glad my deck worked well."

Lindback got his start in **Magic** eighteen months ago. "I was playing a game called *Diplomacy* at a tournament in England, and some friends of mine started playing **Magic**. I liked it right away."

While he also enjoys playing basketball and soccer, it appears **Magic** takes

up most of Lindback's leisure time.

"You know, it's too bad that more people aren't playing **Magic**. It's very popular in Sweden, but I think there are still many people who don't know anything about it."

The Pro Tour will hopefully remedy that situation.

Better Lucky Than Good

By advancing to the semifinals at the premiere pro tournament, Texas native Preston Poulter surprised just about everybody—including himself.

"I didn't expect to get as far as I did. I've never won any big tournaments, so I think I got lucky here," said the twenty-two-year-old Poulter. "I got matched up against opponents early on who I think weren't quite as experienced as some of the other ones I could've been playing. I really learned a lot about the luck of the draw in this tournament.

"But I'd rather be lucky than good."

Poulter, a graduate student in chemistry at UC Irvine, used a sixty-card, green-and-white deck. His strategy worked well, but he ended up dropping a 3–2 decision to the eventual champion, Michael Loconto.

"I had played him before, and he only plays four Counterspells. And he only Counterspells cards that are directly gonna kill him, and that saved him in more games than I can remember."

Preston Poulter

Nevertheless, the Type II format used at the tournament sat well with Poulter. "I wouldn't have played if it was Type I. Type II creates a much more dynamic game. I prefer that."

Asked for his assessment of New York City, he responded: "It looks like it does in all the TV shows. And it's damn cold compared to Orange County, California!"

If I Had a Hammer

One of the most popular players at the NYC Professional Tournament was twenty-seven-year-old Shawn "Hammer" Regnier of Manchester, New Hampshire. He was also one of the best.

At first glance, Regnier can be a bit intimidating: he is a well-chiseled two hundred pounds on a six-foot frame. Sporting a pirate-style, black-and-white bandanna, he can also appear menacing. But fear not **Magic** players, for Hammer is one of the game's most enthusiastic ambassadors.

A professional arm wrestler for seven years, he hung up his grips two years ago for a chance in business. Today he owns and operates Hammer's Comics, one of Manchester's most popular hangouts for **Magic** card players.

"We don't look at **Magic** as a game; we look at it more as a sport," explained Regnier. "The definition of a fun deck to all the kids who come into my store is a deck that wins. And that's the bottom line. We all want to win."

In New York, Hammer flexed his mind as well as

Shawn "Hammer" Regnier

biceps with a sixty-card, blue-and-white "permission deck" and posted a 6–1 record after seven rounds—good enough to make the Round of 16. "People were saying, 'He's just got a Millstone deck,' but I think every Millstone deck is different," he explained.

He next defeated Dennis Bentley of Churchville, New York, 2–0, to reach the quarterfinals. It was here, against eventual runner-up Bertrand Lestrée of France, where Hammer finally ran out of nails—if not time.

"He took so long for each move that it really started to get to me," said Regnier. "And in a tight game against a great competitor, all it takes is one mistake and you're history."

Lestrée escaped with a 2–1 decision.

Resourceful in a Pinch

Eric Tam, Canada's reigning national champ, almost didn't make it to the premiere Pro Tour event. Hailing from Toronto, Ontario, Tam couldn't secure transportation to New York. Not until he got creative, that is.

"My parents wouldn't let me borrow their car, and the insurance was too high for me to rent one because I'm under twenty-five," explained Tam, who is eighteen. "So we called a friend of ours who has a car, Mark Senecal, and said, 'Mark, do you want a chance to win $12,000? We'll teach you how to play **Magic** on the way to New York, and you could win $12,000.' He said, 'Okay, let's go.'"

It's a good thing Tam has adventurous friends. Following their twelve-hour journey south, Tam posted a 6–1 match record, to qualify for the Round of 16. Playing with a sixty-card, white-red-and-green deck using a mixture of direct damage and creatures, he next edged out Chris Bishop of Charlottesville, Virginia, 2–1. Tam's good fortune ran dry in the quarterfinals, however, as he lost 2–0 to the eventual champion, Michael Loconto.

Eric Tam

"I was pretty disappointed, especially after watching him play later on up on the big screen," said Tam. "I think if I play him again, I can take him."

Asked to rate the event overall, Tam wasted no time. "All I can say is one word about this tournament: class. The players are classy, it's run in a classy way, and it's a heckuva way to represent a heckuva game."

Tam's friend Senecal, a quick study at eighteen, competed with the Juniors and posted a 5–2 mark. He won $500 for his efforts. "He was definitely glad he came."

As was Tam. —*T.M.*

Young Guns

Tatomer's Deck (60 Cards)

1 Ivory Tower (4E)
1 Zuran Orb (IA)
2 Paralyze (4E)
2 Strip Mines (4E)
3 Demonic Consultation (IA)
3 Necropotence (IA)
3 Nevinyrral's Disk (4E)
3 Sengir Vampire (4E)
4 Dark Ritual (4E/IA)
4 Hymn to Tourach (FE)
4 Hypnotic Specter (4E)
4 Icequake (IA)
4 Mishra's Factory (4E)
4 Order of the Ebon Hand (FE)
18 Swamp

Sideboard (15 Cards)

1 Feldon's Cane (CH)
1 Ihsan's Shade (HM)
1 Nevinyrral's Disk (4E)
2 Dry Spell (HM)
2 Paralyze (4E)
2 Serrated Arrows (HM)
2 Walking Wall (IA)
4 Fountain of Youth (CH)

Kline's Deck (61 Cards)

1 Balance (4E)
1 Blinking Spirit (IA)
1 Feldon's Cane (CH)
1 Ivory Tower (4E)
1 Jayemdae Tome (4E)
1 Land Tax (4E)
1 Nevinyrral's Disk (4E)
1 Ruins of Trokair (FE)
1 Zuran Orb (IA)
2 Divine Offering (CH)
2 Icy Manipulator (IA)
4 Disenchant (4E/IA)
4 Mishra's Factory (4E)
4 Order of the White Shield (IA)
4 Order or Leitbur (FE)
4 Savannah Lions (4E)
4 Serra Angel (4E)
4 Swords to Plowshares (IA/4E)
4 White Knight (4E)
16 Plains

Sideboard (15 Cards)

1 Abbey Gargoyle (HM)
1 Circle of Protection: White (4E/IA)
2 Aysen Bureaucrats (HM)
2 Circle of Protection: Black (4E/IA)
2 Circle of Protection: Red (4E/IA)
2 Repentant Blacksmith (CH)
2 Serrated Arrows (HM)
3 Karma (4E)

GRAHAM TATOMER (Champion)

Graham Tatomer, a seventeen-year-old from Santa Barbara, California, is a senior at Santa Barbara High School. He's hoping to go to Stanford or to one of the University of California schools. The $12,000 scholarship he earned by winning the Junior division at the first professional tournament should help with that.

Tatomer's been playing **Magic** since *Antiquities*® came out. He does much of his playing at a local game store, Metro Comics, which holds a tournament every week. Tatomer credits his skill to the tough competition in his area.

"I think it's really competitive. Joel Unger—he's one of the top-ranked players—he lives there, and there's other guys like Sam Jojo, Zack Enis, and Eric Andrews. I think that the whole area just has tons of good players. We all play other good players, and we've all gotten good by playing these really great players. But don't get me wrong—it's still hard to win a tournament."

Despite emerging as champion, Tatomer wasn't too happy with the Pro Tour's modified Type II format. "It was frustrating to build a deck: I used ten cards in my sideboard that are just kind of throwaway cards." However, he did note that it made the competition interesting. "You got to see a lot of weird creations."

He's looking forward to the next Pro Tour tournament in May, especially since it's "right next door"—in Long Beach!

AARON KLINE (Runner-Up)

Aaron Kline, a seventeen-year-old from East Windsor, New Jersey, is a senior at Heights Town High School. He's applying to Rutgers University and says that his scholarship winnings ($5,000) will help.

Aaron has been playing **Magic** since it first came out and has introduced a lot of his friends to the game. His father runs a game store called Gamers' Realm, which has gaming tables in the back. It's one of the favorite spots for locals to hang out and play **Magic**. The store also holds small tournaments every couple of weeks.

"I play in my dad's shop a lot," says Kline. "My friends and I go there and practice our decks for the tournaments."

He also plays at Neutral Ground in NYC. The deck he used in the professional tournament was originally designed for a Neutral Ground tournament, then modified to fit Pro Tour rules. Kline was pleased that the Professional Tournament used a modified version of the Type II rules.

"I like it because it gets people to change their decks around. You don't have everyone playing the same exact deck like they do in New York **Magic**." —*Beth Moursund*

Junior Division Place Finishers

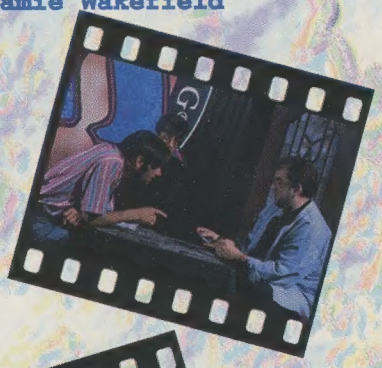
Magic: The Gathering Professional Tournament (New York City, Feb. 17–18, 1996)

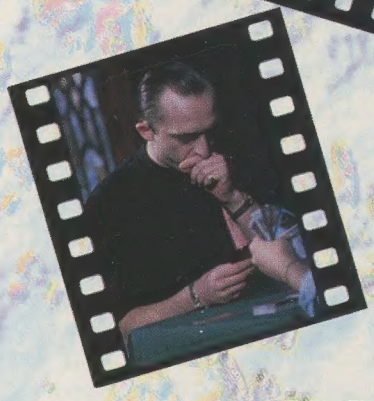
PLACE	NAME	RESIDENCE	AGE
Champion	Graham Tatomer	Santa Barbara, CA	17
Finalist	Aaron Kline	East Windsor, NJ	17
Semifinalist	Ross Sclafani	Brooklyn, NY	18
Semifinalist	Maxwell Suver	Seattle, WA	15
Quarterfinalist	John Finkel	Sanwood, NJ	17
Quarterfinalist	Nate Foure	Devon, PA	16
Quarterfinalist	Brendon Herzog	Portland, OR	18
Quarterfinalist	Jason Norment	Hackettstown, NJ	16
Round of 16	David Bachmann	Linden, NJ	15
Round of 16	Andy Dawson	Trenton, NJ	16
Round of 16	Gregory Kleiman	Linden, NJ	16
Round of 16	Paul McCabe	Toronto, Canada	18
Round of 16	Kevin Reed	Manchester, NH	16
Round of 16	Justin Schneider	Lutherville, MD	14
Round of 16	Mark Senecal	Toronto, Canada	18
Round of 16	Aaron Terry	Plantation, FL	17
17th	Chris Miron	Stratford, CT	17
18th	Ken Habel	Fenton, MO	17
19th	Michael Bregoli	Southwick, MA	16
20th	Nathan Grubb	Kansas City, MO	14
21st	Bob Maher Jr.	Freeport, IL	17
22nd	Michael Cannistraro	Newtonville, MA	15
23rd	Jess Means	Columbus, OH	14
24th	Steven Hirsch	Wantagh, NY	14
25th	Brian B. Wilson	Redmond, WA	17
26th	Dale Kennedy	Toronto, Canada	18
27th	Geoffrey Litwack	Wynnewood, PA	16
28th	Daniel O'Mahoney-Schwartz	Brooklyn, NY	15
29th	Jason Page	Granbury, TX	18
30th	Brian Kibler	Hampstead, NH	15
31st	Patrick Fleischman	Bronx, NY	14
32nd	Feming Chan	Cranbury,	15
33rd	Steven O'Mahoney-Schwartz	Brooklyn, NY	16
34th	Patrick Lui	Toronto, Canada	18
35th	Matthew Perez	Redmond, WA	15
36th	Geoffrey Plauger	Concord, MA	16
37th	Max Szlagor	Schaumburg, IL	17
38th	Kent Kolbig	New Fairfield, CT	17
39th	Cary Darwin	Rowlett, TX	18
40th	Joel Oerter	Denver, CO	15
41st	Thomas Robertson	Switzerland	15
42nd	Corey Hill-Dyer	Miami, FL	17
43rd	Joshua Willis	Frederick, MD	13
44th	James Murphy	Arlington, TX	16
45th	Brad Swan	Landenberg, PA	15
46th	Mateo Pastore	Ithaca, NY	16
47th	David Newman	Wantagh, NY	16
48th	Jeff Feliciano	Naperville, IL	12
49th	Lon Skyler Smith	Grass Valley, CA	16
50th	Patrick Downey	Seaisle City, NJ	16
51st	Sarah Perez	Redmond, WA	12
52nd	Tom Ferris	East Hampton, NY	14
53rd	Daniel Kelly	Ocean City, NJ	16
54th	Jean-Paul DiFranco	Los Angeles, CA	9
55th	Dan Wagner	Elmira, MI	14
56th	Kim Wagner	Elmira, MI	11
57th	Chris Jarmak	Bow, NH	13
58th	Eric M. Covener	Philadelphia, PA	18
59th	Gabriel Balaban	Cambridge, MA	12
60th	Kirby Watkins	River Edge, NJ	14
61st	Tyler Gurciullo	Los Angeles, CA	12
62nd	Alec Scharff	Old Greenwich, CT	12

It's Not Just the Cards

It's How You Play Them

"My friends and I have achieved a new level of play from watching this tournament." -Jamie Wakefield (Top 25 finisher)





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Wizards OF THE COAST

She Can Do Magic

Quick—what do Clementine Bagieu, Stacy Doust, Elaine Ferrao, Michele Denault-Reynolds, Karen Roché, and Jackie Weaver all have in common? Besides the fact that they're all women, they also share the distinction of being the only females (Senior division) to have competed in the first-ever **Magic: The Gathering**® Professional Tournament. Not to be outdone, three younger ladies—Sarah Perez, Kim Wagner, and Michelle Wang—also braved the testosterone-laden waters to butt heads with the Junior division's top **Magic** minds.

Rest assured, this is not the last you've seen of Bagieu, Wang, and company.

"I've competed a couple of times before, but nothing that was quite this big," said Wang. "I also saw a list of all the people who were scheduled to play and noticed how few women were here. That only added to my being intimidated."

To put Wang's assessment into proper perspective, some ratio references are in order. For example, in the eighteen-years-and-over Senior division, a total of 239 participants entered; six were women (2.5%). In Wang's Junior-level ranks, 108 competitors battled, and only three were girls (2.7%). What gives?

"My brother got me started playing **Magic** a couple of years ago, so I'd say that unless a girl has got a brother or a boyfriend who plays, then it's really hard to get involved," said Wang, who lives in Palisades Park, New Jersey. "The problem is it's not that well exposed."

The Strategy Game Isn't Just for Men Anymore

Elaine Ferrao, a twenty-two-year-old elementary school teacher from Suffern, New York, was testing her **Magic** mettle against the Seniors. She's no novice; she placed tenth (out of 250 players) at the Northeast Regionals a year ago. She got her start in **Magic** two years ago when her now-fiancé Kierin Chase bought a couple of decks at a local comic book store.

"We were both lifeguards at the time," recalled Ferrao, "and we needed something to do to help pass the time."

Ferrao's fiancé, Chase, who's now a computer salesman, competed at the NYC tournament as well. "We used to play games like Rummy 500 and Hearts for hours on end," he said. "After a while, things just got a little boring. That's when we started to play **Magic**."

Ferrao was not flustered by the male-dominated field. "I personally don't think it's an issue," she said. "As for being a woman and competing, I really don't think it's a big deal. I went to the Nationals, and I played against a guy who started off our match by saying, 'Oh, I've never played against a girl before.' Well, I beat him, so I guess that was two firsts for him that day."

Nevertheless, **Magic** remains a sport played predominantly by men. Said Chase, "When Elaine finished tenth at the Northeast Regionals, she raised quite a few eyebrows."

Women don't need a boyfriend or a brother or even a **Magic**-playing father to get involved; many simply take the initiative themselves—like Michele Denault-Reynolds, a twenty-nine-year-old accountant from Richmond, Vermont.

Two years ago, while attending a convention sponsored by a pair of local retail shops—Quarterstaff Games and Comics & Collectibles—Denault-Reynolds got her first taste of **Magic**.

"I was walking by and saw a Serra Angel on the table. I thought, 'Hmmm, a busty woman with a sword.' So I said to the guys, 'Hey, if you're gonna give that much power to a female, I've gotta know more about this.' So I sat down, and they were all very friendly. By the end of the convention, I had guys coming up to me giving me cards. They were so excited that a woman was actually playing the game."

Denault-Reynolds' enthusiasm for **Magic** quickly carried over to her husband, Hilary. He knew nothing about the game when introduced to it but was hooked just as quickly.

Female players at the first Magic professional tournament, which was held in New York City on February 17–18, included, clockwise from left: Elaine Ferrao, Clementine Bagieu, Sarah Perez, Michelle Wang, and Karen Roché. Opposite: Michele Denault-Reynolds.

"At that first convention Michele went to, she probably picked up a few hundred cards," he said, "and as it turns out, some of them were pretty rare. So we went back to Quarterstaff Games, and they showed us the game and got us started."

The Denault-Reynolds duo did not place in the top sixty-four in New York; however, their coming to the contest was itself a recognition of their proficiency at **Magic**: their trip was sponsored by Quarterstaff Games as well as Comics & Collectibles. "We came as part of a five-person team," said Michele. "It's been great."

Asked why so few women are competing, Michele answered, "I think that's gonna start to change. A lot of the men I've talked to say their wives or girlfriends or sisters are really interested in learning the game. I think it has a lot of creativity which should also appeal to women."

When asked to describe the competition in New York, Michele said, "I've noticed a lot of people, once they sit down across from their opponent, try to intimidate the other player. When I sit down, I try to get to know the other person who's across from me. But that's probably more of a female thing. I've actually met every one of the females competing here, and each one has come up and said, 'Great, glad you're here.' There's a lot of camaraderie. With the men, it seems like it's just fight-fight-fight."

Of the Senior women competing, Clementine Bagieu of France finished highest (fifty-second overall). A **Magic** player for more than two years, she posted an impressive 4–2–1 match record. She had anticipated a much tougher crowd. "It wasn't as cruel as I thought," said the nineteen-year-old history student. "In fact, they [men players] seemed very pleased to draw a woman. I think because there are so few women competing, they tend to take us lightly."

Stacy Doust also drew some attention during the two-day event. In her opening-round match against 1994 World Champion Zak Dolan, Doust surprised everyone, including herself, by pulling out a hard-fought 2–1 decision.

"I didn't know who he was," said Doust. "If I had, I would have been a lot more nervous."

Some of the men offered their opinions on why so few women play **Magic**.

"I think the problem is, as a general rule in America, women don't play as many strategy games as men. I hope that doesn't come off as sounding sexist, but I think there's a gender difference in how Americans approach games," said Chip Hogan, the reigning U.S. Type I champ.

Junior quarterfinalist Jason Norment probably hit the nail on the head with his assessment. "The problem is, not enough of the ladies have heard about the game," said the sixteen-year-old from Hackettstown, New Jersey. "We just need to get the word out." —*T.M.*

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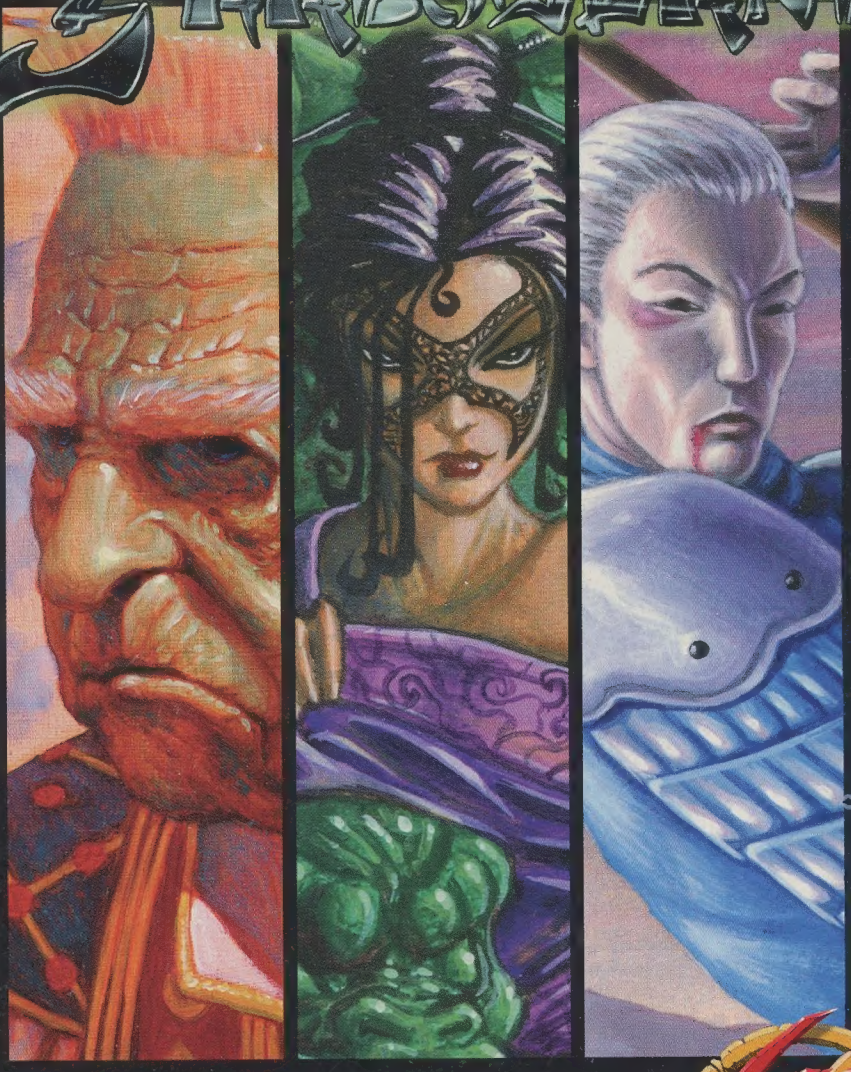

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MARCH 1996

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